DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 615 UD 021 016

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TITLE Attributions and Achievement: An International Study.
INSTITUTION Texas Univ., Austin. Research and Development Center for Teacher Education.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement: Adolescents: *Cultural Differences: Elementary Secondary Education: Foreign Countries: *Locus of Control: *Problem Solving: *Success
IDENTIFIERS Brazil: England: Illinois (Chicago): Italy: Japan: Mexico: Texas (Austin): Views of Life Scale: Yugoslavia

ABSTRACT

Social scientists have only recently begun to explore students' conceptions of their world and the relationship of these conceptions to their success in school. In particular, investigators have found that students who perceive themselves to be more in control of their environment are more successful in school than are students who feel less in control of their environment. Several theorists have suggested that this is a universal phenomenon. The study described in this paper examined children's perceptions about the resolution of problem situations in relationship to their school achievement. The participants in the study were 1800 fourteen year old students from the U.S., Europe, and Latin America. Reading and math achievement scores, grade point average, and the results of the Views of Life scale were collected for each student. It was found that: (1) internal locus of control is not related to school success in all societies: (2) attribution patterns, or ways that children view their world, are culturally conditioned and not universal: and (3) though world view is related to success in school, the way these phenomena are related differs among countries. These results suggest that it is unwise to construct educational theory based on data from a single country. (Author/GC)

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SEP 9 - 1980

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Attributions and Achievement: An International Study

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Social scientists have only recently begun to explore student's conceptions of their world and its relationship to their success in school. In particular, investigators have found that students who perceive themselves to be more in control of their environment are also more successful in school. Several theorists have suggested that this is a universal human phenomena. The present study examines causal attributions and other student conceptions of themselves and their environment in a cross-cultural sample. The findings indicate that while student's world views are substantially related to school achievement, these patterns are culturally specific rather than universal.

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Attributions and Achievement: An International Study

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Psychologists and educators have only recently begun to explore the relationship between students' attributions and their success in school (Coleman, 1966; Harter, 1978; Kifer, 1975; Maehr, 1974; Weiner, 1972). Based on work derived from Rotter's social learning theory and more recently an attribution theory (Jones et al., Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1972), researchers have begun to examine how students' cognitions about his or her environment play a role in school achievement. In particular this work has focused on children's attributions as to whether they are in control of their world (internal) or whether situations or fate determine events (external). The findings suggest that students who perceive themselves to be in control also are more successful in school (Coleman, 1966; Kifer, 1975).

While causal attributions contribute to school success, a variety of other attributions about the school and work environment may also play an important role in students' achievements. Research in the study of how people deal with everyday and unusual stress situations suggests that perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of confronting the problem, seeking assistance, and value of the problem area all play a critical role in the person's resolution of the problem situation (Coelhe et al., 1974). That is, how a person thinks about the entire problem is involved in the resolution. Thus, not only the person's causal attributions but the entire conceptual framework of the person is related to successful behavior. This suggests the need to broaden the study of attributions in the study of school achievement to consider a wider variety of children's perceptions about the resolution of problems.

The present study examines several attributions about problem situations in relation to school achievement. Also, this study seeks to examine the transcultural validity of the relations between internal locus of control and school achievement. Several investigators (Maehr, 1974; Schludermann & Schludermann, 1976; Smith, 1968) have argued that the perception of self-control and its importance for success is an universal feature of human behavior.

The participants in the study were 1800 fourteen-year-old students of either upper-lower or upper-middle class SES. They came from Brazil, England, Mexico, Japan, Yugoslavia, Italy and two cities in the U.S.: Chicago, Illinois and Austin, Texas. Reading and math achievement scores and grade point average were collected from each child. Also, the children were administered the Views of Life scale composed of fifteen dimensions (1) Locus of Control, general and academic, (2) Action - the rate, timing and lack of action, (3) Task Achievement vs. Interpersonal

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Relations, (4) Competitive vs. Cooperation, (5) Independence vs. Obedience, (6) Emotional Control vs. Emotional Expressivity, (7) Exaggeration of Activity or Passivity under Stress, (8) State of Reality - complex vs. easy, (9) Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Values of Work, (10) Value of Earned vs. Bestowed Status, (11) Confrontation vs. Avoidance, (12) Self vs. Other Solver of Problems, (13) Self vs. Other Implementation of Solution to Problem, (14) Instrumentality vs. Fantacy in problem situations, (15) Positive vs. Negative Self-Concept.

Initially, the simple correlations of locus of control and achievement were examined in relation to achievement in all the countries. (See Table 1.) As in previous studies, an internal locus of control was related to achievement in American students, but this was rarely the case for students in other countries. Of the eighteen possible correlations only three were significant. These data strongly suggest that a sense of self-control is not related to school success in all societies.

In order to look at the other attributions and school success, the Views of Life instrument was factor analyzed within each cultural group. The principle factors method was used and it was rotated by the quartimax method. In each country eight factors emerged although factor comparisons (Kaiser et al., 1971) have shown that each factor solution is relatively unique in each country. This suggests that a culture-specific attribution pattern was present in each country; that is, the manner that children view their world is culturally conditioned, not universal. These factor scores were then used in regression analyses to examine the predictiveness of these variables in relation to achievement. Table 2 illustrates the findings of these analyses.

These results indicate that the way the child views the world is substantially related to his/her success in school, however, these results illustrate the folly of constructing educational theory within a single country. In particular, an internal locus of control combines with different attributions in various countries in determining achievement. In Brazil, for example, children who think that they are in control, in a world that is easy and simple, do well in reading achievement. On the other hand, in Italy, students with an internal sense of control over academic matters, who value work for its own sake and rely on themselves for solutions, tend to be good readers. In the United States, a combination of internal control and expressiveness of emotions predicts success in reading. These results demonstrate the importance of children's attributions about themselves and the world in relation to their school success.

The findings in this study indicate the need to broaden the area of children's attributions beyond those involving control of the environment. Also, these findings illustrate the importance of examining relationships in a cross-cultural context. Contrary to the hypothesis that locus of control should be a transcultural dimension that is important to school success everywhere (Maehr, 1974; Schludermann & Schludermann, 1976; Smith, 1968), the present findings showed different effects in different countries.

At the same time they reveal that the construct of control is incorporated into different constellations of concepts in different societies. It is this more complex culture-specific Weltanschaung that is critical to school success.

Table 1

Correlations of Locus of Control and Academic Achievement in Seven Countries[1]

Countries	Reading	Math	Grade Point Average
Brazil	.20	ns	ns
Mexico	.16	ns	ns
Italy	ns	ns	.18
England	ns	ns	ns
Japan	ns	ns	ns
Yugoslavia	ns	ns	ns
Austin, USA	.26	.26	.32
Chicago, USA	achievement data not available		.16

[1] All correlations significant at $p < .05$

Table 2

Views of Life Factors that Significantly Predict Achievement in Seven Counties[1]

Countires	Reading Achievement
Brazil	Independent Deliberate, Intrinsically Motivated, and Cooperative Internal Locus of Control; Views life as simple
Mexico	Intrinsically Motivated and Independent Solves Problems with Others Views Life as Complex
Italy	Fast Rate of Action, Active Under Stress Internal Academic Locus of Control, Intrinsically Motivated, and Independent Solves Problems with Others (Prefers Immediate Action, Interpersonal Relations, and Emotional Expressivity) (Self-Initiator and Positive Self-Concept)
England	Confronts Problems Cooperative Active Under Stress
Japan	(Self-Initiator)
Yugoslavia	Independent
Austin	Views Life as Complex Internal Locus of Control; Expressive
Chicago	Achievement Data Not Available

[1] All variables listed were significant at the .05 level of confidence.

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